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Director's Cut: Towards Ecotourism 2.0

On World Tourism Day, I took 5 minutes off my daily routine, to think how ECOCLUB can improve its efforts & results towards a more ecological Tourism. My feeling, a result of correspondence with many of you, is that the broad Ecotourism movement, has reached a crossroad, and must pick the correct path in order to maintain its freshness, relevance, coherence and raise its voice and power. An Ecotourism 2.0, confident & outward-looking, with political power, with a clear ecological message, internationalist, pacifist, making full use of the internet and direct democracy.

Personally, I am fed up with Pontius Pilate Governments who avoid their responsibilities through voluntary measures, private initiatives and charity. With government-funded non-governmental organisations acting as the long arm of powers that be, and government organisations masquerading as private concerns. With powerful tourism interests endlessly paying lip service to the millennium development goals (which millennium would that be, the fourth?) and congratulating each other through opaque awards.

We need laws for all rather than optional, voluntary arrangements for the few. But laws that are realistic, that can be applied, not draconian ones that encourage corruption. Certification, if it is to acquire any real meaning, should not be a marketing exercise involving conflicts of interest at the local level, and an exercise in empire building at the international. We also need authentic reviews by knowledgeable tourists, but also to give the opportunity to people who toil for ecotourism - accommodation & tour providers - to be given a fair chance to respond. We also need laws, local, national, international. A clear, level-playing field for all.

I am fed up with self-congratulatory announcements about the importance of Tourism with a "billion tourists" (inflated 3 times by frequent travellers travelling business class, in fact a tiny share of the world's population), which "employs millions" (frequently with abysmal working conditions), and with incredible (invisible?) peace-building abilities, when the evidence is thin, and when the tourism status quo is invariably silent tourism infrastructure is destroyed during conflicts, when brutal dictators and mafias invest in Tourism, when ecotourism practitioners disappear, or when tourism becomes a cover for intelligence gathering before renewed conflict.

I am fed up with international tourism bodies eulogising tourism while at the same time pleading, begging, instructing "the Media" what to say and what not to say. Media should report whatever they wish, and hopefully scrutinize powerful tourism interests as well as the performance of those paid to govern tourism, be they in the public sector, the private sector or the ngo sector. Media should neither 'educate' (Orwell) or 'be educated' (Orwell). On the other hand we should be aware of the oligopolistic and concentrated control of mainstream media groups and their partiality and shady role in key issues. There is a choice: prefer independent, internet media, local media, these Web 2.0 days potentially everyone of us!

Equally, we should be weary of endless reports produced by multilateral bodies, some overpriced, others dumped, others pulp non-fiction, few authors bothering to look up what is already written, even fewer bothering to read it. We need local reports in synch with local policy for RESULTS, not more models & hair-splitting, head-scratching theories. We need reports written in the language of the people, and representing the interests of the people, not of the top brass! And I better not say too much about the proliferation of green tourism events that invite speakers irrelevant or even hostile to the interests of ecological tourism, only because they are part of some invisible merry-go-round, or just because they are well-oiled. Or how most events are used as a rubber-stamp of old decisions, decisions that have usually less to do with promoting a cause, than slicing a pie.

In my view Ecotourism should build / rebuild its connection with the broad ecological movement and green (minded) parties in particular. Here in Greece, the destructive fires have hopefully revealed to small tourism operators that their interests are identical with those of ecologists - the preservation of the local environment & culture. As a result, and a consolation, environmentally-friendly parties did well in the elections.

Nationalism, economic nationalism and social racism has no place in Ecotourism, and this should remain so. National Ecotourism societies in particular should not imitate their tourism counterparts but constitute a true alternative. At the same time, Ecotourist proponents (the true "Ecotourists") should not shy from participating in national & international tourism bodies. National Ecotourism societies should also beware of creating monopolies, stifling competition and remain clear of nepotism and shady deals that may discredit Ecotourism in their countries.

Ecotourism, as it becomes more popular, should not forget its roots, and remain firmly in favour of small businesses owned by small local entrepreneurs, communities and the many expats genuinely keen on helping local communities. At the same time, neoconservatism is hopefully on its way out, so let us discourage neo-liberal talk, especially in Ecotourism, and stop overemphasizing the role of private initiative and talk of the 'ecotourism market', the 'ecotourism products', the ecotourism 'consumer', the 'monetary value of wild animals' and other Orwellian approaches. As in all movements, there are different viewpoints and conflicting interests, we do not necessarily need to agree at all times. Politics is an art, the art of the possible, and Ecotourism is no different. That said, the mainstream should come to us, not us to the mainstream. We should defend our role and rights within the system so as not to be marginalised, however without any trade-offs in terms of our ecological principles.

In terms of funding, we should aim for appropriate sources of funding, from within our ranks, be weary of fat cats and fat grants with strings attached. Big is rarely beautiful. We should vigorously guard our financial independence or risk losing it.

In a world plagued by poverty and injustice, overemphasis on holiday carbon neutrality can be counter-productive, purist and hypocritical - in one word, puritan. Let's take this (very real) problem to the two or three airline manufacturers of this world, not pass the buck to over-borrowing, hard-working travelers who make the extra effort to go and see and support remote communities. Airline routes are what railways were in the 19th century, they are the developing world's exit strategy from poverty. At the same time we also desperately need more and better railways and electric, affordable cars and buses. Ecotourists need not be luddites!

I am aware that if we all are to change Tourism even by an inch, we have to face off powerful interests and we therefore should have no delusions of grandeur or overestimate our power. Some should not be so keen to trade-off their principles for a slice of the pie and becoming part of the status quo. But we should not be timid either. The world can change, the world has always been changing.

In terms of organisation, let's opt for a multipolar, decentralised, pluralistic, internationalist, democratic Ecotourism movement of equals, without – or at least with less – bureaucracy & coziness with those who really like it as it is, a.k.a the status quo.

Antonios B. Petropoulos

▷ [More Director's Cut](#)

▷ [Members: Express your views online on the above!](#)

The ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards - 2007

WINNING PROJECTS - PROGRESS UPDATES

Winning Project: **Turning Gorilla Poachers into Farmers - RWANDA**

Undertaken by: Rwanda Eco-tours Agency, Rwanda (Web: www.rwandaecotours.com)

Funded by: The Members of ECOCLUB through the ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards 2007 – Euros 300 so far

Summary: Creating an alternative means to local people around gorillas' national park with an alternative livelihood that will absent them from wildlife poaching and the degradation of mountain gorilla habitat.

Progress so far:

Several meetings were held among local communities about the award received and to arrange for the execution of the project. During the meetings, communities identified different constraints and how to deal with them for the project to bear the targeted profits. During the meeting the Chief Park Warden, Law enforcement and community conservation warden of the Parc National des Volcans talked to communities and highlighted the need to work together and safe guard the endangered species; the mountain gorillas (*gorilla beringei beringei*).



Community meeting with Edwin SABUHORO of Rwanda Eco-Tours, Chief Park Warden and Community Conservation Warden of Parc National des Volcans at the park headquarters.

During the meeting, communities elected their leaders who will make a follow up and link the projects in all the communities and make sure they all work and get the best results. Due to the fact that community associations identified in the project had benefited from an earlier project with Rwanda Eco-tours, the following community member (ex-poachers) were selected to benefit from the project; Sabyinyo: 120 community members, and Bisoke :108 community members who of recent put down their poaching tools to become conservation volunteers. Given the positive effect this has had on community's livelihood and conservation, as evidenced by park wardens, communities decided to hold conservation education on the grass-root level to inform other community members of their target after renouncing poaching habits.

Because of change of weather, communities have prepared their fields ready for September season and to harvest in November 2007. After this, the communities will buy Irish potatoes hybrid seeds for plantation.

Full Report: <http://www.ecoclub.com/awards/07/rwanda.pdf>

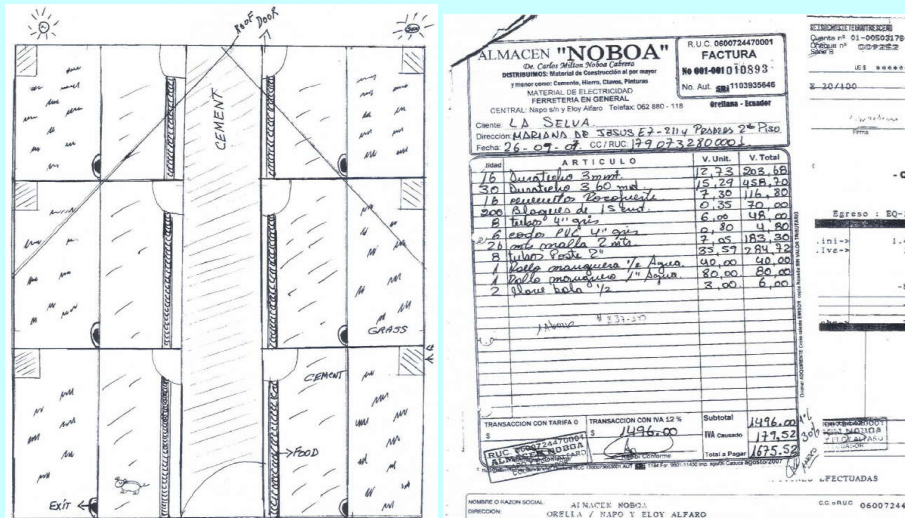
Winning Project: Pig Farm for Wildlife Protection - ECUADOR

Undertaken by: La Selva Jungle Lodge, Ecuador (Web: www.laselvajunglelodge.com)

Funded by: The Members of ECOCLUB through the ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards 2007 – Euros 300 so far.

Summary: The difficult to balance carrying capacity of the lodge and the desires of local indigenous people to hunt fresh meat all come together in a pig farm.

Progress so far:



A team created by the La Selva Lodge Staff, after much more research has led to modifications in the initial farm design. The size has been reduced, given the completed pig farm and additional budget of USD 400 per month, and instead of exporting the pig waste, a drainage system has been developed by which the lodge can reclaim some marshy land nearby and grown not only tropical fruits for guest and also supplement the kitchen waste so that it will be sufficient to feed the pigs when the occupancy is low. Materials have been purchased and are in the Lodge ready for the construction. A pig master has been selected, this will be the former butterfly master (who was explicitly told not to breed any pigs that fly ☺). La Selva have also hired full-time a master carpenter/mason and plan to begin construction in October.

Full Report: <http://www.ecoclub.com/awards/07/ecuador.pdf>

Winning Project: Plastic Bag Recycling Microenterprise

Undertaken by: Carpe Diem Travel Limited, Cambodia (Web: www.carpe-diem-travel.com)

To be funded by: The ECOCLUB.com Ecotourism Awards 2007

Summary: Creation of a microenterprise to collect and recycle discarded plastic bags by turning them into a range of useful products.

Progress so far:



Since conceiving this project, Carpe Diem have undertaken the following steps:

1. Researched the most efficient methods of creating the “wool” from collected bags and undertaken a costing exercise for yarn production.
2. Discussed and agreed upon the process for collecting bags. Initially the aim is to encourage collection of litter in the countryside and villages around Kampot, where Epic Arts is based.
3. Identified one member of the disabled community and two members of the deaf community who are already highly skilled in knitting and crocheting. These will make up the core team. They have already undertaken some practice knitting with the plarn, replicating existing items made of wool, to get used to the feel of it and see what types of design work with the texture.
4. Explored design options. It has been determined from testing that small items are not well suited to the texture of the plarn. Although detailed designs can be made, the resulting product looks very “amateur” and is unlikely to have widespread appeal

Full Report: <http://www.ecoclub.com/awards/07/cambodia.pdf>



THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

COSTAS CHRIST

"Economic and social justice along with protecting nature are core values that should be found in all ecotourism practices."



An internationally recognized expert on sustainable tourism, **Costas Christ** serves as the Judging Chairman of the World Travel and Tourism Council - Tourism for Tomorrow Awards. He is a contributing editor and columnist for National Geographic Adventure magazine and also the Chairman of the Adventures in Travel Expo Conferences in North America. He supports Big Five Tours and Expeditions as their "Ambassador at Large" for their Spirit of Big Five travel philanthropy program that supports the protection of cultural and natural heritage in tourism destinations around the world. His own travels and work have taken him to more than 100 countries across six continents including expeditions to some of the world's most remote wilderness areas and archaeological sites.

He is a founding member and former Chairman of the Board of The International Ecotourism Society and served as Senior Director for Ecotourism at Conservation International in Washington DC, where he supervised ecotourism projects in 18 countries.

In addition to his monthly column in National Geographic Adventure, Costas' articles and essays on travel and tourism have appeared in numerous publications, including the International Herald Tribune, New York Times, and Sunday Times of London. He is the lead author of *Tourism and Biodiversity: Mapping Tourism Global Footprint* and a contributing author in *Wilderness: Earth's Last Wild Places* and has appeared many times on television and radio, including CNN, BBC, National Public Radio, Voice of America, CBS, ABC, and PBS.

The Interview follows:

ECOCLUB.com: You are a true Ecotourism pioneer with a 360 degree knowledge of Ecotourism worldwide, as a founding Member of TIES, a senior officer in many ecotourism-related organisations, an accomplished ecotour guide in Africa and Central America, a travel journalist for major publications, with a career in public and private sectors. So what made such an able and ambitious person believe in the potential of Ecotourism and how has it lived up to your expectations? What would be the "Costas Christ" definition of Ecotourism?

Costas Christ: In 1990, I sat around a table at an old farmhouse outside of Washington DC with a handful of people from different countries who shared the same vision and we spent two days trying to come up with what would become the first definition of ecotourism - "Responsible travel to natural areas that protects nature and sustains the wellbeing of local peoples." It was the first Board of Director's meeting of The International Ecotourism Society and that definition we came up with is still the guiding definition for ecotourism all around the world. For me, that is how I continue to define ecotourism to this day. Of course, there are many other aspects that pertain to ecotourism, but in that definition you will find the two pillars upon which ecotourism stands - protecting nature and bringing benefits to local people - socially, culturally and economically. For me, the ideas for ecotourism began back in 1978 when I was living and working in Africa. I had originally gone to Kenya to participate in a wildlife research project in the remote Samburu Game Reserve. During my time there, I found myself in the middle of a growing conflict between local people, struggling to meet basic needs around the park and the park rangers who were tasked with protecting the wildlife. In the middle of this drama of conflict between local people and park managers over access to natural resources - grazing land, wood, water - was a thriving tourism safari industry generating millions of dollars for business owners in far away capital cities like Nairobi and London. Yet the local people who lived closest to what the tourists were coming to see were struggling to survive, facing poverty, while every day park rangers had to contend with poor equipment and little funds available to monitor and protect the wildlife that was at the center of the conflict.

It occurred to me sitting around a camp fire each night, and after learning the local language and getting to know the concerns of the local villagers first hand, that conservation of rare and endangered wildlife and protection of natural habitat would never succeed unless the people who lived closest to those places we want to protect, become partners and allies in the process. In the middle of all this was tourism generating huge profits. I thought that tourism - properly planned and managed - could be the economic engine to address poverty and generate the funding needed to effectively manage and protect wilderness areas. The local people would become partners and allies when they had a direct stake in the management and economic benefits of tourism and when protected areas got a bigger piece of the tourism economic pie. In the case of tourism itself, it seemed to me


that the very foundation for business success in the long term was to protect the natural and cultural heritage of our planet. I started calling this idea "conservation sociology" in the 1970s. In the 1980's, I was referring to it as environmental tourism and by 1990, it had morphed into ecotourism. During this same time period, other people in Africa and elsewhere in the world were having similar ideas and eventually we would connect with each other and put in motion a global ecotourism movement. I still believe in it as passionately today as I did in the shadows of Mount Kenya when these thoughts first entered my mind 29 years ago. Along the way, there have been many challenges but we have learned from failures and built upon the successes.

I think it is accurate to say today that ecotourism was the catalyst for transforming the way we travel. There are now hundreds of successful ecotourism projects and businesses around the world. Sustainable tourism, agro-tourism, geotourism, green travel - all of these different offshoots of responsible travel practices grew out of the early days of ecotourism.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Is there a real need for Ecotourism certification? Is it feasible?**


Costas Christ: I think that certification will eventually come whether we think it should or not. Travellers continue to ask for an easier way for well-meaning tourists who want to take a nature or adventure trip to have some kind of label or certification that they can rely on to know what companies are doing the real work to make tourism an opportunity for our planet and not a threat to it.

We do not yet have a globally accepted standard for ecotourism certification nor an easy way to fund such a global certification scheme but Eco-Australia's certification program, Rainforest Alliance's "Smart Voyager" certification and the CST program in Costa Rica are examples of the evolution of working certification programs that seem to be having a good impact.

 **ECOCLUB.com: In relation to your experience in Africa, does tourism make a real difference? Can it really bring peace and prosperity or are these prerequisites? Do luxury safaris and exclusive lodges adequately benefit local communities overall, apart from a handful of community-owned luxury lodges? Is luxury and exclusivity morally acceptable in this continent, or should tourists rather patronise more modest outfits?**


Costas Christ: Africa should cast its net wide and have all forms of tourism from low cost safaris to high end luxury. Of course, what type of tourism you have varies from destination to destination, but certainly there are excellent luxury camps like Campi Ya Kanzi in Kenya or Phinda Private Reserve in South Africa that have had major positive impacts on the lives of local people and protection of nature. Tourism done well according to the principles of sustainability, can make a significant contribution to the economic well being of rural peoples and the protection of wildlife in Africa. And a prerequisite for tourism's economic and social benefits is peace and stability. At the same time, tourism can also lead to more peace and stability between countries. The East African countries of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are continuing to look at how they can once again (post cold-war era) create a working East African Community of nations to promote economic and political cooperation through the movement of tourists across their borders. In Mozambique, the Peace Park that straddles Mozambique and South Africa came together as a way to facilitate tourism economic development in the region as well as promote conservation and peace.

So tourism can play an important role in building bridges of cooperation and understanding between the governments and peoples of different countries. Also, when it comes to international tourists, having more Americans and Europeans travelling to Africa in a responsible way allows them to get to know Africans first hand. It helps to dispel the myths and stereotypes about Africa and Africans and allows Westerners an opportunity to understand that Africa is not just a place of tragedy but one of hope, incredible natural history and about the strength and dignity of her peoples.

 **ECOCLUB.com: As an ecotour operator and activist do you voice your concerns about human rights and social injustices or do you prefer to "leave only footprints" as the mantra goes?**

Costas Christ: My entire involvement with ecotourism from the very beginning has been about addressing fundamental human needs - the right to education, health care, clean water, food, and social justice - just as much as it has been about protecting the environment and saving wildlife.


In the late 1980's, I was declared persona non grata and ordered out of Kenya by the Moi regime because of my stinging political criticisms published in the New York Times and International Herald Tribune about the government's human rights abuses, rampant corruption and escalating wildlife poaching in and around national parks. A close friend of mine - an old Kenya park ranger who was like a mentor to me - was killed by poachers in 1989 who drove on the main road right into Meru National Park in day light and drove out with no problem whatsoever. To me that is as much a human rights abuse as it is a crisis for protecting wildlife. Kenya is much better off today than it was then with leaders like Nobel Peace Prize winner, Wangari Mathai, serving in the government which is why it has also had a resurgence in tourism in recent years. But economic and social justice along with protecting nature are core values that should be found in all ecotourism practices.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Recently when you were presenting the prestigious 2007 Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, in Portugal, you stated: "the winners represent a major turning point in the global tourism industry. Gone are the days when there were only a handful of ecolodges or a few small tour operators who were doing sustainable tourism**

successfully. Today's best practice models also represent major tourism destinations and global tourism companies that are helping to protect cultural and natural heritage and support the well being of local peoples." So, are global tourism giants really doing enough? Some believe that they only offer a pittance as a share of profits to social & environmental projects and that the rest is motivated by CSR considerations for their annual reports. Is there a real cause for celebration?


Costas Christ: Fifteen years ago, people said that ecotourism would never work because the companies would never really offer more than lip service to the principles of protecting nature and sustaining the well being of local people. They were right in the sense that some companies did nothing more than a pittance, as you say, to the real principles of ecotourism. But many more companies went much further and the result today is that ecotourism is no longer an experiment. It is a reality with successful ecotourism companies operating across the world and making a positive difference in the lives of local people and protecting nature.

Around the year 2000, seeing considerable success with ecotourism, I became worried that most of that success was confined to what I would call "mom and pop" small businesses. I began to think that we might look back 20 years from now at the legacy of ecotourism and see that we were just able to change 5 percent or less of the global tourism industry - not enough to make tourism a real opportunity for safeguarding cultural and natural heritage around the planet and addressing poverty alleviation. So I shifted tactics and began to focus my attention on the mainstream tourism industry, embracing sustainable tourism which basically takes the principles first associated with ecotourism and applies them to urban hotels as well as large tourism resorts, airlines, cruise ships, etc. In other words, bringing the principles of environmentally-friendly operations, giving back to support cultural heritage preservation and contributing to nature protection right into the heart of the entire global tourism industry. It is a huge challenge but I am convinced that the issue before us is not "does sustainable tourism work" but rather just how far can we take sustainable tourism to transform global tourism into a catalyst for helping to protect our planet, address climate change and make peoples lives better. We are off to an encouraging start as more, larger companies adopt these practices. In many respects, given the staggering growth rate of the travel and tourism industry, nothing less than the future of our planet is at stake. There is so much to gain if we get it right with sustainable tourism and so much to lose if we do not.


 **ECOCLUB.com: And talking about Awards, from your experience, how satisfied are you about the relevance of Awards for encouraging real change in Tourism? Who is entitled to vote in these Awards - and what about conflict of interests? (panel member one year, award winner the other).**

Costas Christ: I think that well conceived sustainable tourism award programs with a transparent methodology and real teeth in verification of winners claims, are very important for recognizing the best practices that are out there as models for others to see and learn from as well as for giving credit to the companies that have worked hard to make sustainable tourism a reality.

In the case of WTTC's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards, of which I have been the Chairman of Judges for the last 3 years, it has been extremely important for these Awards to set the standard for the industry recognition of best practices. We have over a dozen international judges from all over the world representing different areas of expertise - government, private sector, non-profit, academic, etc - along with other experts who make on site inspection visits of all Award finalists to make sure that what they are saying they are doing in sustainable practices is really being done on the ground. I know of no other global tourism award program that does on site inspection visits and evaluation reports in addition to collecting voluntary information presented by the companies in their Award applications. So it is a very rigorous process and methodology in selecting finalists and winners. While we do invite some former winners to become judges (given their demonstrated expertise in sustainable practices) we have never had nor would we permit someone to serve as a judge one year and then apply for the Award the next as you mentioned. Each year we continue to look for ways that we can improve the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards and in the process, the award winners and finalists serve as models showing that sustainable tourism "can be done". This is a particularly important message for the big companies out there and they are starting to listen more as evidenced by this year's winners.


 **ECOCLUB.com: Do you feel that Tourism progresses rapidly enough, in terms of working conditions and environmental impact? (If not, what in your view needs to be done to speed up social & environmental progress in Tourism?)**

Costas Christ: I wish it was proceeding more rapidly in terms of better working conditions and environmental impacts but we cannot give up in our efforts to make that happen. Since so much of tourism depends on the integrity of cultural and natural heritage attractions in destinations around the world along with an excellent tourism product, ultimately sustainable tourism is as much about good business planning as it is about altruism. We cannot and should not give up in our ongoing work with the public and private sectors to make tourism the opportunity it can be for our planet and its peoples - particularly in developing nations that may be rich in natural habitat and cultural diversity but poor in economic resources. We need to remain steadfast and learn from our mistakes to help tourism reach its highest potential to make a better contribution to the world. This has been my guiding philosophy for nearly 30 years now in trying to transform this industry in positive ways.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Both of your parents are from Greece, you grew up in the States while you have travelled and worked all around the world. This self-globalisation is increasingly expected from world leaders, especially in the Tourism sector. You have kept in touch with your roots, and groundroofs through your work, however, from your**

experience, do most of your high-flying peers have time to relate to local / national sensitivities, prejudices, worries? Is that a problem when devising international tourism policy?

Costas Christ: About ten years ago, I told a journalist that one of my fears was that ecotourism would do more for the jet set conference industry than it would for local people and the environment. While I do not think that has happened, I do feel that it is incumbent on anyone who truly wants to be involved with these issues in constructive ways to keep themselves with one foot fully grounded into the lives and aspirations of local people and the natural environment that we are all ultimately connected to. The other foot needs to be in the world of policy makers and private sector CEO's etc that are making big decisions to affect the lives and environment for people the world over. I left Washington DC and moved to a farm in Maine six years ago so I could live closer to the family farmers and small communities in North America that are trying to survive in the face of globalization. In that sense, it is kind of a reverse of the slogan "Think Global, Act Local." In my case, it is more, "Think Local, Act Global".

 **ECOCLUB.com:** You have written numerous articles for some of the leading English language newspapers and television channels, so you know both sides of Ecotourism media coverage. How fair are the media in their coverage of Ecotourism? Recently a major news agency invited to Oslo for the GEC could only cynically report that 'Ecotourism is equally harmful' ignoring all that was discussed and presented. Why do media always give the benefit of the doubt to other forms of tourism, such as Responsible, Ethical and so on, but are so eager to bash Ecotourism? Are they jealous or a victim of orchestrated misinformation?

Costas Christ: Some media in their pursuit for "news" like to build things up and then bash it down. We saw this happen with ecotourism. Media has jumped on the bandwagon of reporting on efforts to save the environment and then on the bandwagon, in their minds, of why those efforts are failing or false, or whatever. I cannot tell you how many reporters I know who are asked to write about ecotourism and still think it means a bird watching trip, missing the underlying principles that can change a nature vacation into ecotourism. Just going on safari does not mean ecotourism. Yet many reporters miss that important fact. When I saw the article you mentioned that came out of the recent Global Ecotourism Conference in Oslo state that ecotourism experts now say ecotourism is damaging the world, I thought to myself how misinformed that was and how misleading it is to the general public. The truth is that if travel were to stop today from going to the far flung corners of our planet to see nature we would experience an environmental nightmare. With no economic incentive to protect the Serengeti through tourism, the vast plains that hold the last great land migration of wild animals on our planet will become grazing land for domestic cattle. The Pantanal in Brazil, largely protected because of its ecotourism potential would be lost to other development and cattle ranches. South East Asia's coral reefs and marine national parks would have little incentive for protection through the economic benefits of marine tourism. We would see species vanish like the Scarlet Macaw in Belize if there was no economic reason through ecotourism to protect them for visitors willing to pay money to see and photograph them. The list goes on. Before anyone says that we need to stop travelling to save the earth, they should think very carefully about what that would do to protected areas around the planet and to the peoples whose economic livelihood is from tourism in places like El Nido in the Philippines, where tourism income can mean the difference between poverty and feeding your family. The issue is not to limit or stop travelling as a way to deal with global warming, etc. Travel is part of our very human nature and has been with us for a long time. The very definition of a human being in ancient Tibetan - the word groba - means one who goes on migrations. Rather, in modern times, we need to work on how travel can be more sustainable. That is the goal.

 **ECOCLUB.com:** You have already accomplished many things for Ecotourism. What next?

Costas Christ: My efforts are focused on greening the mainstream tourism industry now. How we bring the principles of sustainability into the full spectrum of travel and tourism worldwide. My goal is nothing less than to transform global tourism into a force for helping to save our planet. Together, I honestly believe we can make this happen. There has been tremendous progress in recent years and truly, I never imagined we would even be this far along today in terms of the many examples of sustainable tourism success that are out there now. But we still have a way to go to get to our destination. As the great Greek writer and philosopher, Nikos Kazantzakis said, "It is by aligning ourselves with the cause of our times that our life bears fruit". Protecting nature and supporting the well being of local people around the world is a worthy cause. It is the road I have chosen to travel.

 **ECOCLUB.com:** Thank you very much!



THE ECOCLUB INTERVIEW

NIKKI ROSE

"If we think tradition should be offered to us for free, we are part of the serious problem. The people we meet during our travels are not obligated to treat us to a single peanut, let alone a feast free of charge. They are not our free entertainment – no matter who we are."



Nikki Rose, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries Founder and Director, is a Greek-American professional chef and writer. She is a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and has worked in fine dining establishments and cultural-culinary education in Paris, San Francisco, New York and Washington, DC. She explored Greece for over 10 years before settling down in her grandmother's homeland of Crete in 1998 to form Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries.

Ms Rose has designed and hosted distinctive culinary arts preservation seminars since 1996, featuring leading US chefs. Her programs are approved by the American Culinary Federation for Continuing Education credits and have been professionally videotaped for educational purposes.

Nikki Rose was assistant cookbook editor at the Culinary Institute of America, working on professional and commercial cookbooks. She contributed to "Thirty Secrets of the World's Healthiest Cuisines" (John Wiley & Sons). Her published articles, upcoming book and documentary focus on traditional cuisine, culture, sustainable agriculture and environmental issues.

Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries programs or "Intensive cultural immersion experiences" according to Nikki, cover the whole picture of Crete: culture, natural beauty, organic food and gardening. Classes are conducted in residents' kitchens, gardens, olive oil factories, vineyards and ancient sites. Presentations are by local experts who have a proven track record in cultural preservation projects and sustainable tourism action programs. Over the years, CCS has expanded its all-local network to include 40 small businesses and individuals throughout the island.

Nikki Rose frequently speaks about eco-agritourism at international conferences and advises start-up programs, authors and researchers on the responsible travel as a means to help solve social and environmental issues.

The Interview follows:

ECOCLUB.com: Following your work over the past three years, it is evident that agrotourism & culinary tourism is far more than a job for you, you are a really passionate and articulate advocate. So, what brought you to culinary tourism and to Crete?

Nikki Rose: You are very right. I am a passionate advocate for preserving the cultural and culinary heritage of Crete, and created CCS as a vehicle to communicate the vital relationship between our beautiful environment, our heritage and the often damaging choices we make regarding travel and tourism.

Cultural-culinary heritage preservation has been my focus for over 20 years. I trained to become a professional chef and have worked with many extraordinarily skilled chefs and farmers. I have watched the foodservice and agriculture industries become more and more automated at the expense of quality food, safe food, and our environment.

In reaction, I began organizing dynamic educational seminars to rekindle public interest in the culinary arts, featuring fantastic chefs, sustainable organic farmers and artisan producers. The overwhelming interest and enthusiasm from the public fuelled my own. This led me to my family roots in Greece over ten years ago, where sustainable organic farming and artisan production is still of way of life for more people we might imagine.

Today, Crete's Culinary Sanctuaries supports the efforts of over 40 small businesses and individuals working on action programs to preserve Crete's culture and environment. CCS is an internationally acclaimed program for best practices in responsible travel.

 **ECOCLUB.com: How would you honestly feel if two people in suits arrived one day to monitor and certify your culinary tours, in the context of some quality or environmental regulation?**

Nikki Rose: My objective is to celebrate Crete's culture and natural beauty – to build alliances with people already working on related projects. This is the CCS network. Part of our work includes education and presenting distinctive cultural immersion seminars. We share our knowledge about what we cherish and have worked very hard to help preserve, which has proved to be very beneficial for others.

Many people have already visited us - to learn about our work and share the information they acquired here with colleagues around the world. They did not wear suits, though, since we provided them with advice on practical attire for rural living. We are not available to host all interested parties, but try to make the time if they are also working on action programs. We have businesses to run. So, if the hypothetical observers are not practitioners, and planned to apply a generic checklist, based on mainstream standards in food and travel, I fear we would all become frustrated. But if they are agents of collaboration, then we all win!


CCS does not fit into the categorical box of culinary travel. Some people in our network do not work in tourism at all. My approach to education is considered unique, so a generic box is much too limiting for CCS network projects. The closest familiar descriptions are cultural heritage preservation or Responsible Travel practitioners. CCS is a benchmark for best practices in responsible travel. We have received international recognition for our work from The World Tourism Forum for Peace and Sustainable Development, World Travel and Tourism Council, et al. We exchange information with fellow practitioners, researchers and journalists. CCS cannot solve all of the problems of the world, but we can, and we do, salute and support people working on beneficial preservation programs.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Does agrotourism (agritourism) make a real difference in present-day Crete, or is it simply an add-on activity for large resorts.**

Nikki Rose: Great question. What is agritourism? Since most of us are not farmers, we don't know what to expect. Agritourism is supposed to support rural communities. In the case of organic agriculture, it also helps to protect our environment. So, agritourism can make a difference, as part of the bigger picture of preservation and responsible travel. Residents can share their knowledge and visitors can enjoy a fantastic cultural immersion experience. The mutual benefits can be infinite. But logically, agritourism is sporadic, supplemental income for most farmers. There are not many good, structured programs in Crete yet. It requires much more concrete support from the beneficiaries.

Responsible agritourism is offered by people that already have an extremely difficult business to run. Farming is not a 9 to 5 position, it is a life-long commitment. Supplying us with excellent food and wine is far more challenging than we might ever know or appreciate. While it might be a lovely notion if farmers could take the day off to entertain us, we are asking for the world. So, the time farmers make to devote to us is a rare and wonderful privilege. By contrast, if agritourism is viewed by hoteliers and travel agents as just another way to attract customers, and these businesses do not form mutually beneficial partnerships with local rural communities, it can turn into a disrespectful simulation of rural life. This can deny travellers the experiences they are looking for and limit a community's opportunity to create jobs within their own field.

Responsible agritourism is a business, run by accomplished professionals. As long as the media and mega travel agencies instill the message that "cheap travel deals are the way of the world," travellers will never be aware of the true cost of travel, including the long-term environmental and social impact that travel has on the communities they visit, and the true cost of good and safe food. We all need to know what responsible agritourism entails, if we are expecting to enjoy such valuable benefits. To successfully, as you asked, "make a difference", the cooperation between entrepreneurs, cultural and environmental preservationists and travellers must be strong.

 **ECOCLUB.com: You are known as someone who does not mince their words, even in ministerial press conferences. In the unlikely case that someone had absolute power over Crete, inhabited by famously fiercely independent-inhabitants and the only place in Greece where people are allowed to carry guns – and that person was you, what 3 measures would you take in relation to tourism and the environment?**

Nikki Rose: I'm a realist. Dreaming of hypothetical power is free for someone else. To isolate tourism and environmental protection from all other societal issues, is not something I'd attempt to do. Crete is still much safer and cleaner than Washington, DC. To reserve the legal right to own a gun does not mean you plan to use it irresponsibly. In Crete, I've seen guns used for the purpose of hunting - for food, that is. If this seems barbaric, then we should all become vegetarians.

I think that fierce independence is a good thing, if it's aimed at protecting your culture and environment. If it shifts to damaging your own neighbourhood, without concern for others, then that is another story. Crete is a beautiful island with a fascinating history. To lose that legacy to reckless entrepreneurs would be a tragedy. So, some steps a group of concerned citizens might take are: 1. More education and implementation of powerful cultural heritage and environmental protection programs, and sustainable organic farming practices. 2. Education and implementation of responsible travel programs. 3. Education in promoting the results of the above.


Tourism should not be "all or nothing" – to be overwhelmingly damaging for any community. We can learn from both the worst and the best practices around the world.

 **ECOCLUB.com: What is the optimum tour group size for a good, authentic culinary experience? Do you limit size through prices or by other means?**

Nikki Rose: CCS network seminars are experiential learning - cultural immersion. Registration is usually limited to eight people. This gives people the opportunity to spend quality time with residents, dine in their homes, discuss the topics in detail, and explore the region more freely. As a small group, people have a rare opportunity to enjoy rural life, rather than observe it from a tour bus window. The benefits of such experiences are immeasurable. Though CCS seminars are expensive to present, we strive to make them accessible for the many, and not just the privileged few.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Laws and regulations are sometimes daunting for a small business, such as a small tour operator. What is your experience?**

Nikki Rose: It's amazing that any small business can survive in today's climate. CCS is no exception.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Is there a magic formula to preserve authenticity in the face of repetition & commercialisation? You once told me that some Cretan villagers, your local partners, refused to accept payment from you for demonstrating their traditional culinary skills, and you had to insist. Should tradition be monetised in your view? Is it a question of "use it or lose it"?**


Nikki Rose: There is no magic formula to preserve cultural-culinary traditions. Preservation is a difficult practice. Yes, there are realistic ways to support preservationists - sustainable organic farmers, artisan producers, ecologists and many others working on related projects – via responsible travel programs and other means. RT is not standard practice. It is a very different, ethical way of doing business. RT means providing communities with the resources they need to build programs that work for them, not an outsider's vision of what local traditional culture should be. RT is crucial work that greatly benefits all of us. If we choose to play an active role in preserving our vital resources, we need to pay the practitioners.

If we think tradition should be offered to us for free, we are part of the serious problem. The people we meet during our travels are not obligated to treat us to a single peanut, let alone a feast free of charge. They are not our free entertainment – no matter who we are – public officials, entrepreneurs, journalists, researchers or travellers. Tradition is not ours to take for granted. It is ours to safeguard and support. If we want to be part of the solution, we need to be the solution. Ethical businesses cannot survive without ethical patrons.

Many people do not know much about tradition, so it requires education. Modern society often repels tradition. Industrialization of our food sources has proven to be dangerous to our health and environment. So the more we learn about traditional methods of food production, the more we know that it is a critical necessity today. To become a practitioner of tradition requires skill, investment and risk. Practitioners must also be educators and activists. Without solid opportunities to gain a return on these business investments, tradition continues to disappear. So, yes, we are losing "it."


Some travel agents, travellers, public and private entities, researchers, journalists and even food affinity groups have asked people in the CCS network to provide their knowledge and goods for little or no money. This is just wrong. They are requesting the services of accomplished professionals to help them with their own work, or provide a memorable travel experience but they are not giving back in return, in tangible economic benefits, to local people preserving traditions. This is a use it and destroy it approach to tradition.

So, while the imperative work of preserving tradition via responsible travel is taking off, we must all participate if we expect it to soar. Education, awareness and respectful partnerships between the providers and beneficiaries are the key. Responsible travel can improve our quality of life and environment. If we choose to be a part of sustainable solutions, this is our opportunity. It requires our action. To determine how to ethically monetize tradition, just ask the practitioners. We will discover how wonderful and beneficial cultural-culinary traditions are, and how we can all work together to preserve them.

 **ECOCLUB.com: You have international experience as a chef, in the restaurant sector, an industry that many find glamorous, but which insiders know as cut-throat and with abysmal working conditions backstage. How different is it really from the tourism sector?**

Nikki Rose: All industries can be inhospitable backstage. It's from these experiences that I chose to work in a very different manner. I'd like to think that the principles CCS represents -- sustainability, respect and fair compensation for our network participants, promotion of their work, and respect for the environment, ameliorates both the glamour and the cut-throat attitudes you allude to.

The hospitality industry is a service, not an invitation for maltreatment. We can choose to be a serious part of the problem or choose to be a part of the solution. Sure, you can find inconsiderate proprietors everywhere, but there are better, ethical ways to do business, which is what CCS strives for.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Travel journalism, is characterised, blighted according to some, by fam trips. What is your view? Are these ethical? And do mass travel media have a genuine interest in your work and sustainability, or are they mostly trying to attract lifestyle-conscious readers and advertisers?**

Nikki Rose: Some people are looking for solutions to societal and environmental problems – to be "green", as they say. They want to do a little or a lot in their own lives to make a difference. Businesses are the same. They can turn many shades of green to supply demand. That includes the media.

A true green travel article should include facts about the destination's action programs in cultural heritage preservation, fair labour practices, social issues and environmental protection. So many exploitative businesses feed the travel industry. An article listing interesting places to go is not enough information. Travellers might do more harm than good, if they don't know the whole story. For the many journalists that care, and know much more than they are permitted to report, I commend them on working so hard - to fight to get their stories to us. As a writer myself, I know how hard this battle is. Also, as a host to a continuous stream of journalists passing through Crete, it's challenging to clarify how rare CCS projects are, and to keep our work out of a potentially damaging mainstream box. CCS programs cannot be narrowed down to "a list." There is a fair amount of information available to report on responsible travel respectfully and professionally. Publishers need to give journalists the time to cover these stories properly. Responsible travel is not a trend or the wave of the future, it is a necessity of the present.

Access to the media is problematic for most responsible travel practitioners. By nature, projects are community-based small businesses, so they have little influence in the PR world. 90% of the people in the CCS network do not have websites - it's just not feasible. So, if a journalist relies on the internet to find information on destinations, then RT practitioners are at a great disadvantage. However, many projects are now listed in guidebooks and on web directories of conservation groups like ECOCLUB, thankfully.

An increasing number of institutions are promoting responsible travel and subcategories thereof. This is great news to increase awareness, although the more subcategories we have, the harder it is for travellers to find RT programs. Also, some group membership fees and conferences are very cost prohibitive for practitioners. It's as though the community is prohibited from attending community meetings. RT develops from the ground up – within local communities. International awareness of the issues and support can expedite that process. At this stage, more emphasis should be on sustaining current projects and supporting expansion. Strong collaboration between advocates and practitioners is essential for the success of RT programs. If advocates joined together to support practitioners in a very practical way, I think the message of responsible travel options would rapidly increase.

Of course, travellers deserve a "great getaway" but they need to be aware that it might come at a higher price on society and the environment than they ever imagined. People need more information in order to make better choices. Only responsible travellers can sustain responsible travel programs.

 **ECOCLUB.com: Do you plan to expand your trips in Crete and beyond, or do you believe that small is beautiful?**

Nikki Rose: I am currently working to establish a base for CCS - for experiential learning that will simultaneously help to preserve Crete's cultural-culinary heritage. The base will have an organic farm, of course, where we can organize more intensive programs covering culture, farming and cuisine. It is what we have already done for over a decade, but we will be saving precious time and our atmosphere by travelling less.

CCS promotes collaboration first and foremost, which is the only way to implement and expand long-term preservation programs, in my opinion. So, when it comes to preservation, big is beautiful.

 **ECOCLUB: Thank you very much.**

ECOTOURISM PAPER SERIES**Ecotourism in Himachal Pradesh – The Way Forward***by Jasjit Singh Walia**

The Indian State of Himachal Pradesh (H.P) is a mostly mountainous area neighbouring Tibet and China in the East, the Indian states of Jammu and Kashmir in the north and northwest, Punjab, Haryana, Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh to the south. It has an area of 55,673 square kilometers and a population of 6.1 million people and is located at altitudes ranging from 350 to 7000 metres (1050 to 21000 feet). There is a wide spectrum of geographical diversity over varying attitudes diverse, colorful and varied --- from plains to the Shivaliks to the lower Himalayas to the mighty great Himalayas to the forbidding heights of the cold deserts.

This majestic, almost mythic terrain is famous for its beauty and serenity, but the harsh reality is that Himachal faces serious environmental decline. The forests of Himachal Pradesh (H.P) which constitute two-thirds of the state's geographic area are crucial to the region's environmental and economic well-being---a storehouse of rich bio-diversity, vital in preserving the fragile Himalayan eco-system, and a primary livelihood source for its rural population. The 'forest sector' encompassing the entire biophysical and environmental components, highly sensitive to the uniqueness of the mountain environment, must place its people at the centre. The Himachal Pradesh Forest Sector Policy & Strategy Policy 2005 represents a bold new direction for the State Forest Department, which had largely been focused on timber production. The government has charted a new course to shift forest policy in a way that recognizes the ecological and social value of environmental services as well as its economic values. It involves creating opportunities for the poor and enhancing natural resource management.

Ecotourism was identified as one of the avenues to alleviate poverty and enhance livelihood options in the Himachal Pradesh Forest Sector Policy & Strategy 2005 wherein it was stated: "Nature based tourism including wilderness tourism will be promoted in consonance with the eco-tourism policy of the State with an aim to maximize benefits for local communities..."

- The government will encourage rural tourism for enhancing rural livelihoods.
- Dispersed tourism will be encouraged to decongest popular destinations and promote equitable benefits.
- Regulatory systems to minimize potential negative impacts of tourism to the forest sector will also be set up."

The above policy statement set the tone for revision of the Himachal Pradesh EcoTourism Policy, 2001. With this back drop the 'Revised Eco-Tourism Policy' was notified in 2005 by Government of Himachal Pradesh. The intent was to ensure that developing booming tourism in the state is environmentally benign, decentralized and that its benefits are equitably distributed – particularly to local rural households. In 2006, the instrument to carry it forward, the HP Ecotourism Society (EcoSoc) was made operative, through required facilitation provided by the HP Forest Department (see website: <http://www.himachalecotourism.com>). The defined cornerstone was community-based upliftment with the belief, that the development of a new perspective on partnerships would enhance natural resource management and help create new employment opportunities in the rural areas. The policy also attempts to open up the heritage, colonial period built, forest rest houses, to the discerning tourists, to inculcate appreciation of nature through strict adherence to the concept of carrying capacity and sustainable development of the area.

The organizational culture at HPFD (Himachal Pradesh Forest Department) has slowly been changing to embrace the shift in policy to sustainable management and eco - services development through ecotourism as a venture. The journey has not been easy, involving local and international expertise, and judicial intervention. It began with the 1995 Supreme Court ban on green felling in Himachal, which triggered an interest in eco-services as a solution worth exploring, to offset the declining budget for forestry works. In the following years a dynamic and consultative process involving all stakeholders began, with the comprehensive HP Forest Sector Review (FSR) in 1999-2000 (IIED 2000). The economic valuation of forest products and services was led by Dr. Madhu Verma of IIFM Bhopal, in 2000, with technical assistance from international donor agencies. WINROCK International India (<http://www.winrockindia.org>), partnering with International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) has explored the potential for markets for watershed protection services and improved livelihoods. Many reform-minded projects followed, with various donor funded participatory experiments in joint forest management, and mooted the establishment of the Himalayan Development Authority—a mountain forum for redress and compensation for conservation costs.

There is a conviction that valuing eco-services and developing green solutions will play an integral role in moving the mountain state towards poverty alleviation.

The clarion call to focus on sustainability, ecosystems and enhanced natural capital productivity has also meant a rethink in H.P. Forest Department (HPFD) which till now had concentrated attention on plantation forestry. Ecosystem Management is being highlighted with less emphasis on the production forestry aspects of the past (Marcot, Holthausen et al. 2005). The objective of the HPFD is to handle the complexity of the new social, economic and environmental perspectives to think across ecosystems without specific boundaries. The simplification and conversion of the natural stands and reliance on mono-species afforestation, which seriously affects biodiversity, will not work. To popularize ecotourism, the landscape approach to handling degraded forest areas is gaining ground as it is dynamic, multifunctional, multi-use, productive, healthy and sustainable.

Whilst sustainability requires a balancing of priorities between various stakeholders, in developing countries, the clear emphasis must remain on the poor, who are most dependent on natural resources. The marginalized forest dependent poor, especially women, are the target group requiring poverty alleviation through natural asset improvement. David Pearce's Environment for the MDGs (Pearce 2005) makes the case that the poor tend to reside in areas of stress and low-quality natural resources—such as low soil productivity, contaminated water, steep slopes, and polluted grounds—making them increasingly prone to diseases, water shortages, landslides, floods and other hazards. Their low productivity asset base is usually further depleted by large herds of livestock. The few environmental assets that the poor own are typically low quality and rapidly depreciating. The high discount rate of the asset base spurs the poor to undermine the future when it comes to managing their assets. Rather than managing for the long-term, they tend to take what they can when they can. Social capital and community cohesiveness breaks down under environmental degradation and resource scarcity.

The H.P forest sector recognizes sustainable forest management as the path towards increasing emphasis on social and environmental goals believing that for poverty alleviation and meaningful improved livelihoods, economic solutions are required to be found through natural capital enhancement. If the H.P. Forest Department is to effectively make this shift, it must take three important steps: a) recognize the value of ecosystems and environmental services to halt any further decline in the natural capital stock, especially where it concerns life support systems such as water; b) develop market mechanisms and incentives that promote future development of eco-services; c) create a more collaborative decision-making process that recognizes the rights of a variety of stakeholders to participate in decision-making, whether it is NGOs (Non Government Organizations), villages, academia, other public agencies or the private sector.

1. Valuing Ecosystem Services

The international community recognizes that the natural ecosystem and the environmental services they supply are intrinsic to achieving sustainability. The U.N.-led Millennium Ecosystem Assessment analysis (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Panel 2005) provides a benchmark for assessing the benefits people obtain from ecosystems, and it concludes that the total economic value from managing an ecosystem sustainably is far superior to the value associated with mere conversion of the ecosystem. The “wild” state is more beneficial than an extraction-based human-dominated model, with the benefit/cost ratio as much as 100:1 (Costanza 2006). To convert natural forests to agriculture, horticulture or other development uses in the name of human well-being comes at tremendous cost, since it means losing out on many important environmental services. The arena of eco-services has provided (a) a platform for a facilitating dialogue among all forest stakeholders for effective adaptive management; (b) establishment and maintenance of multiple-resource forest databases to accommodate new stimuli in trends, threats and issues; (c) problem solving research capacity; (d) provision for new experimentation like the environmental service payments, along with good forestry practices and (e) healthy regulations to activate the path towards sustainability and development (Sayer, Maginnis et al. 2004).

Environmental losses translate into economic losses. A World Bank study has shown that natural environmental capital is a critical component of the asset base in most developing economies (Hamilton, Ruta et al. 2005). Millennium Development Goal 7 (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment Panel 2005) targets poverty eradication and points to the need to focus on environmental resources such as soil and water resources on marginal lands, to promote agricultural productivity, thereby benefiting the poor. A shift in policy from an income-based to an asset-based approach is clearly required. In contrast to past theory, environmental improvement is consistent with economic development. Indeed, it is arguable that economic growth cannot be sustained without environmental sustainability. The Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC) is a classic contention that environmental investments secure a lower rate of return than investments in other forms of capital. Such theories are now being challenged and their premises questioned (Pearce 2005). Some financially viable investments (Pearce 2005) that could be explored in Himachal and which have a bearing to make the ecotourism venture robust are:

- Improved water supply, safe drinking water and improved irrigation (e.g. drip irrigation) can increase productivity and improve sanitation, which would reduce water-borne diseases.
- Soil conservation and land tenure policies can affect productivity and biodiversity and provide incentives to farmers.
- Increased access to sustainable energy services also offers higher returns on investments.
- Protection (from conversion of forests to cropland) and restoration of natural ecosystems (for ecotourism) is also a good investment.

Any successful strategy in optimizing an ecosystems approach in Himachal, must necessarily:

- Formulate an integrated land use policy, especially since fragmented land holdings are unproductive;
- revise land capability classifications and land utilization according to assessments;
- encourage multi-tier / multiple use natural resources management (NRM) practices, avoiding use of productive arable land for development purposes; provide adequate financial and technological resources for wasteland and fallow

reclamation, regenerating degraded areas, compensating adequately for diverted land and its treatment, and providing technology to achieve best-use practices;

- regulate water use for optimum productivity of land through catchments, regulate watersheds and ground water resources and improve methods of irrigation;
- educate the public on supporting and promoting sustainability;
- cultivate economic livelihood options such as medicinal/aromatic plants, fodder production/pasture improvement, economic use of weeds, production of raw material for other village-based industries, and value added processing;
- create cross-sectoral coordination and linkages, especially between the various departments that actively feature in the forest sector, e.g. forest, agriculture, rural, animal husbandry, horticulture, irrigation and public health or the tourism departments.

A key difficulty in valuing eco-services is in calculating the monetary value of what are typically intangible assets. Tangible assets such as timber and some non-timber forest products may be as simple as asking the market price. On the other hand, eco-services such as ecotourism, carbon sequestration, temperature control, soil stability and clean water are very difficult to quantify. Research in this area is growing but remains largely in its infancy. Clearly the value of nature is inherently complex. Environmental benefit indicators (EBIs) are quantitative and transparent measures of ecological and social conditions which are derived from geospatial information and other public data sets. EBIs need to be explored and defined before values can be assigned (Boyd and Banzhaf 2005). To generate cash, most landowners in H.P. resort to traditional land development—either agriculture or horticulture—and have no economic incentive to preserve or enhance the natural functions of their land. If natural assets were properly valued, so that the market compensates people for the public and private ecological services that their land provides, there would be greater incentive for conservation of natural capital. Under an eco-services model, beneficiaries must pay for services they currently take for free, and when there is a conversion of an ecosystem service, there should be compensation to the state for lost benefits.

2. Developing Market-Based Incentives for Eco-services

Building a healthy partnership between the public and private sector is critical to developing eco-services programs which are financially viable and sustainable in the long-term. This would help reduce the pressure on primary forests, especially the reserve and demarcated protected forests, which can be qualitatively improved to meet their eco-services role.

Despite their shortcomings, market-based approaches to sustainability can help achieve environmental goals. Governments can use markets to help them effectively manage public goods such as environmental protection. However, market mechanisms work best when the government apparatus works in partnership with the “invisible hand” of free market economists (Scherr, Andy et al. 2002). The government must set limits on the use of an environmental good or service. Markets look to governments for consistent policy regulations, a robust system to protect property rights, equity, involvement of relevant stakeholders, trust among market participants, easy access to market information, and understanding of possible market externalities (Bayon 2004). Other factors that are necessary for markets to work equitably are fair competition and consideration of the effects of markets on third parties, such as the poor (Bayon 2004). Free markets allow for ongoing price setting, are continuous and replicable, affect large amounts of people and businesses and can move effectively, internalizing environmental costs into the economic system. Well designed markets can complement governmental regulation. The markets for eco-services are not yet mature, and are characterized by unsophisticated payment mechanisms, low levels of price discovery, high transaction costs and thin trading (Bass 2001).

3. Creating a diverse and participatory process

Decentralization and devolution of authority is in the air and everyone is talking of strengthening decision making at the village-level. Many governments are decentralizing control of forests and divesting themselves of forest assets. Responsibility for forests is being placed in the hands of regional, municipal and local communities. At the local regional level there is space to integrate cultural and religious interests. In Himachal, under the ecotourism venture, prioritization has been extended to a lot of forests called Devta (deity) forest lands that are protected and conserved, as it is felt that the area is to be revered. This concept can work as the religious ties are acutely strong in the mountain area. The trend is towards local community forest resource planning. Donor funded projects with local bottom-up planning and the current devolution to hand over decision making to rural communities are empowering the marginalized communities, who have started recognizing their rights to steer their own course. The trend for community ownership and management is on the rise. Though the government maintains its dominant position, the benefits from community ownership and management are visible—in fire control, removal of encroachment and illicit felling protection, patrolling, management or monitoring and ecotourism. The evolving ownership pattern has provided the community with both a challenge and an opportunity, to work towards livelihood solutions and to manage their resources productively through sustainable conservation.

The spark for developing a sustainable forest management approach and propagate eco-services like ecotourism in the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department has come primarily from adverse public reaction to inappropriate forest management policies practiced in the past, leading to a fundamental shift in its approach. The question being posed is that under these changing conditions, would the Forest Department act responsibly as a lead agency and coordinate the transition to eco-services &

sustainable forest management? The role of the HPFD has changed from an expert-driven, enforcement-oriented (policing) one to a collaborative, consensus-building one. For this, the forest management objectives and also the forest officer/manager's skills and attitudes all need to change. Would the HPFD be able to facilitate and complement a regular, equitable, participatory system through which multiple forest stakeholders themselves can meet, debate strategic issues, consider optional solutions and form partnerships to realize the multiple forest values?

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ECOCLUB MONITOR



Peloponnese on fire – August 2007

Greek Fires

Greek fire usually refers to the inflammatory concoction with which Byzantine Greeks used to set alight enemy ships. True to byzantine thinking, especially during election time, everyone was blamed for the fires ranging from “foreign spies”, “anarchists”, “asymmetric threats”, “opposition elements”, to motorway and tourist developers and land speculators. The sad truth is that this disaster (68 lives lost, 2.5 million acres burnt, 12% of total forest land) mostly in the southern Peloponnese peninsula, is simply due to a complex combination of extreme weather (3 weeks over 40 degrees Celsius, no rain for 5 months), chronic fire brigade understaffing & underfunding, political appointments at key fire brigade posts, side lining & decay of the forest service which used to be quite effective in prevention measures, inappropriate waste management policies at village level, undermaintained electric power line routes crossing natural areas, and,

to a smaller degree, arson for a multitude of reasons ranging from land speculation, to score-settling among villagers to misguided, attention-seeking youth. The center-right government, recently re-elected, largely indifferent about environmental causes had attempted to revise Article 24 of the constitution which declares all forest land as belonging to the state, but this was seen as one more controversial privatisation attempt, was opposed by all environmentalists and was blocked by the opposition, with some key government MPs even voting against their own party. Our equally lethargic local government however is as much to blame as the central government. Environmental awareness is also low, but this *may* change if the administration and media properly explains the reasons for the fires - rather than engage in a witch-hunt. The electoral result, where a new Green Party for the first time received 1.08% of the vote was seen as a direct result of the fires. Not all was lost, the famous world heritage site of Olympia was successfully defended. Fires are a natural phenomenon in the mediterranean landscape. Pine forests burn easily thanks to resin and flying cones but also auto-regenerate easily (also thanks to the flying cones) so there is hope, especially as the rainy season is near, although rains have already been delayed by a month with meteorologists predicting dry, warm weather until December. International contributions in the form of fire-fighting aircraft & personnel (& financial assistance) were forthcoming and much needed even though Greece has one of the largest fire-fighting fleets in the world. Interestingly there was one very affluent country that instead of aid, suggested that Greece lease the aircraft of a private company. (*perhaps this is how one becomes very affluent?*). As far as Tourism is concerned, the Peloponnese needs to avoid mega-projects in the devastated areas. The fires should not give the green light to tourism & golf developers of mega-resorts and sprawling villa developments. The pressure to develop in such a manner will be even greater, with profiteering masquerading as poverty alleviation and reconstruction. We need ecological, low-key Tourism, not a resort monoculture. The signs are ominous: four days before election day the then vice-minister of Economics (now moved to another ministry) and President of the Greek Golf Federation, signed a decree offering a 259 hectare coastal Natura protected area to the municipality of Zaharo for tourism development, causing a hostile reaction from the Minister of the Environment. The project is presented [online](#) in four languages, in a manner that speaks for itself: “The municipality of Zacharo intends to create a model village consisting of identical wooden houses and with the right to build on an unlimited number of square metres per unit.” The move has provoked the wrath of all opposition parties, with the Ecologists-Greens Party pledging that they will be trying to block this development through legal means.

Greek Islanders protest against National Marine Park

A crisis, lesser in scale yet reminiscent of the Galapagos conflict between park officials and local businessmen & fishermen, took place during August 2007 brewing in the otherwise quiet and offbeat island of Alonissos, part of the Sporades island group in North Western Aegean. Alonissos is the only inhabited island of the Alonissos National marine park, which was set up in 1992 to protect the endangered Monachus mediterranean monk seal (only 300-400 remaining in Greek seas). The park includes Alonissos and 8 uninhabited islands, some of which had previously served as navy practice targets. With an area of 2,200 square km, it is the largest marine protected area in the Mediterranean, at least on paper, and the only one to have a hospitalisation facility for seals. A gradual decline in traditional Tourism, and the failure of nature tourism to materialise may have led to the crisis and the protests by local businesses. Alonissos has few tourism attractions besides the marine park, as architecture in the local port Patitiri is modern & non-distinct, in sharp contrast to quaint neighbouring Skopelos, while the island lacks the iconic sandy beaches or quality accommodation facilities of Skiathos island. The park is vast and impossible to see in a typical day trip and not exotic enough to attract nature tourists, with monk seals being very shy animals. Local business interests attempted on the 3rd of August to occupy the offices of the marine park, however they were resisted by office personnel, and thus confined themselves to blocking entrance to the office and throwing eggs & yogurt to the building. The police initially kept a low profile, not wanting to take sides. Then on August the 4th a protester verbally abused and physically attacked the coordinator of the Alonissos park Vassilis Kouroutos (see [ECOCLUB Interview](#)), a leading marine biologist and veteran conservationist, who pressed charges. A few vandalism later, the police and the district attorney intervened, leading to an uneasy truce. The local protesters feared/alleged that they were being held 'hostage' to a 'strict' conservation regime which 'scars away' tourists and developers. They were particularly irate about patrols and spot checks (and fines) to boats carrying tourists within the marine park. A petition with 1,500 signatures was sent to Ministers, local MPs and the prefecture of Magnesia, demanding a renegotiation of park boundaries. Allies appeared in unlikely places: the current head of MoM, the society for the protection of the Mediterranean seal (ironically - founded & previously headed by Vassilis Kouroutos) was quoted by an Athens daily traditionally supportive of the (300,000 strong) recreational hunting & fishing community, that the park authorities 'were to blame' for falling out with the local community. What is clear, and as in the case of the other greek national marine park in Zakynthos, a 'national' parks can not survive without 'local' support, while gaining hearts and minds (and stomachs!) requires far more than central government edicts. On the other hand, environmental conservation should not take the back seat to short-sighted but locally powerful, private economic interests. On the brighter side, the ANMP reports that two baby seals were born in late September in the park.

► Related: Alonissos National Marine Park – <http://www.alonissos-park.gr>

ECO & MEMBER NEWS ROUNDUP

World: Oslo Statement on Ecotourism released

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) released on 15 August the Oslo Statement on Ecotourism, which is an outcome of the Global Ecotourism Conference 2007 (GEC07), in Oslo, Norway, 14-16 May. Marking the 5th anniversary of the International Year of Ecotourism, GEC07 was an important step forward for the global ecotourism community's efforts to strengthen its voice and to influence the travel industry to become more sustainable. David Sollitt, TIES Executive Director, says, "Serving both as a summary of the discussions that took place during GEC07 and as a practical tool for promoting ecotourism, the Oslo Statement on Ecotourism should be used by all ecotourism stakeholders to assess the current state of the global ecotourism community and to evaluate the challenges facing ecotourism." The Statement highlights ecotourism's past achievements and future challenges, and puts forward recommendations about ecotourism's roles in safeguarding the world's natural and cultural heritage and bringing positive changes to the travel industry. It also calls upon international agencies and governments to recognize the valuable role that ecotourism plays in local sustainable development. The statement can be downloaded at:

http://www.ecotourismglobalconference.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/08/Oslo_Statement_on_Ecotourism_Aug_2007.pdf

World: Davos Declaration calls for Tourism action against Climate Change

A new Davos Declaration on tourism & climate change, reached at the conclusion of a three-day UNWTO-backed meeting in the Swiss town better known for its annual economic forum, recognises that "the tourism sector must rapidly respond to climate change, within the evolving UN framework, if it is to grow in a sustainable manner." The 2nd International Conference on Climate Change & Tourism discussed the role tourism can play in addressing climate change to meet the UN's Millennium Development Goals, and concluded that the tourism sector must lessen its greenhouse gas emissions, derived from transport and accommodation activities, adapt tourism businesses and destinations to alter their practices, utilize technology to bolster energy efficiency and obtain financial resources to assist poor regions and countries.

"We know that the solutions for climate change and for poverty are interrelated," said UNWTO Assistant Secretary-General Geoffrey Lipman, while Stefanos Fotiou, who heads UNEP's Tourism Unit, pointed out that the Tourism industry is "challenged by climate change and at the same time is not an insignificant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions".

Related: http://www.unwto.org/media/news/en/press_det.php?id=1411&idioma=E

Americas

Peru: Enviro's oppose reduction of National Park for Oil extraction:

The protected and pristine forest to the west and south of Tambopata Research Center in Peru, a famous ecotourism destination, can be profoundly affected by a legal amendment proposed to the Ministers Council on September 25, 2007. The amendment aims to reduce the Bahuaja Sonene National Park by 209,000 hectares (516,000 acres) and open it to oil and gas exploration, among other activities. The area at risk is an uninhabited and pristine tract of rainforest in the Candamo and Tambopata basins, home to record numbers of plant and animal species, declared by The National Geographic Society as one of the world's seven "iconic natural sanctuaries." Thousands of ecotourists visit Madre-de-Dios every year to visit the incredible spectacles of hundreds of parrots and macaws at clay licks. This is also one of the last strong holds of the world's largest otter - the Giant otter, and jaguars and other large wildlife are also abundant in the area. Environmentalists allege that a consortium of oil companies have been behind a new bill which aims to reduce the area of Bahuaja-Sonene National Park by 19.22%. It is thought that the oil and gas companies may be capitalizing on the country's recent misfortunes caused by an earthquake to push through what would have been an unpopular proposal under normal circumstances. A high-ranking government official linked to protected areas has already resigned in protest.

Related: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/save-candamo-heart-of-the-bahuaja-sonene-national-park-peru>

Saba: "Change is in the Air" - El Momo goes 100% smoke-free

El Momo aims to become the first 100% smoke-free hotel on Saba. The hotel's new policy is a result of guests expressing a demand for a healthy, smoke-free hotel experience. El Momo considers a smoke-free policy as a natural evolution to its eco-friendly philosophy. Industry research has confirmed a clear consumer demand for a clean, smoke free hotel environment. El Momo's staff will also benefit enormously from this effort to improve the quality of life rather than being required to enter smoke-filled rooms, experiencing holey sheets, burned mattresses, stinky ashtrays, smelly rooms, curtains and walls. No employees should be required to risk their good health for the sake of their jobs. Second-hand smoke toxins and residue can stay in fabrics anywhere from a couple of hours to a couple of months after initial exposure, even after they have been washed. The new policy will come into effect on January 1, 2008.

Related: <http://ecoclub.com/elmomo>

Ecuador: Pachijal Ecological Reserve introduces new Ecolodge

Pachijal Ecological Reserve is pleased to announce the opening of a new Ecolodge and preserve in the world-renowned birding and naturalist haven of the Mindo Cloud Forest, Ecuador. Easily accessible via a newly opened modern roadway just two hours from Quito, Pachijal guarantees visitors a unique ecological wonderland experience. Set in one of the most bio-diverse areas on the planet, boasting 500 bird species in a delicate paradise of orchids, see-through butterflies and mammoth tree ferns, Pachijal

offers accommodations in a place integrated with nature. Visitors to Pachijal can experience their choice of tranquillity: yoga, artistic retreats or adventure, with expeditions of birding, tubing, hiking, or horseback riding led by experienced indigenous guides. Packages start at \$200 for 3 days/2 nights, rates include escorted tours, lodging, meals and transportation.

Related: <http://www.pachijalreserve.com>

United States: North American Ecotourism Conference takes place

Nicaragua: Butterflies Festival at Domitila Wildlife Reserve

Domitila wildlife reserve, the first private protected area in Nicaragua, is pleased to announce its upcoming event "Butterflies Festival at Nicaragua's Dry Tropical Forest". The festival involves specialist forest hikes and lectures conducted by leading Nicaraguan entomologists Jean Michael Maes Ph.D. (Entomology Museum Director, Leon, Nicaragua) and Eric Van Den Berghe Ph.D. (Science and Biology Dean, Ave Maria College, San Marcos Nicaragua.) The programmes (7 days, 6 nights) start on November 16, 2007 and end on January 13, 2008. There will be a maximum number of 14 guests on each weekly programme. Domitila lies in the heart of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor, one of the richest biological areas in Nicaragua, and protects the last patch of dry tropical forest at the shores of Lake Nicaragua (Lake Cocibolca) and one of the last remaining in Central America.

Related: <http://ecoclub.com/domitila/activities.html#special>

Asia & Pacific

India: The Blue Yonder wins the Condé Nast Traveler World Savers Awards 2007

The Blue Yonder was one of four winners at the "Condé Nast Traveler World Savers Awards 2007" in the categories "Spreading the Wealth" and "Preservation" and received an Honourable mention in the "Tour Operators" category.

Related: <http://theblueyonder.com/awards.htm>

Laos: Lao Ecotourism Forum deemed a 'great success'

The Lao Ecotourism Forum, held July 26-29 in the capital of Laos, Vientiane, was evaluated as a great success by the national tourism authorities, with over 80 seller booths, 70 handicraft and provincial tourism exhibits, 54 buyers, nearly 100 official delegates and media coverage from around the world. In addition to the Mekong Ecotourism Mart and Mekong Ecotourism Conference, the Lao Food Festival, 5km Mekong Fun Run and Biggest Baci Pha Kuan in the world display attracted a combined total of more than 10,000 people. The Chairman of the Lao National Tourism Administration Minister Somphong Monkhonevilay expressed confidence that "the event has helped to raise the profile of ecotourism products and services in Lao PDR and the GMS region." The forum may be repeated in 2008. Copies of the presentations made at the Mekong Ecotourism Conference can be downloaded at the forum website.

Related: <http://www.ecotourismlaos.com/forum2007/index.htm>

Europe

Greece: Chios Agrotourism Festival

"Eco-action", an ecotourism NGO, participated in the 3rd Agrotourism Festival of Chios at Chios Island, which was held with great success on the first week of August 2007 in the municipal gardens of the island's capital. Attendance once again exceeded expectations, with visitors passing the 20,000 mark, over 10% higher than in 2006. There were 59 exhibitors in total, including the prefectures of Chios, Kastoria and Evia, many municipalities and NGOs. At the "Eco-action" stand many visitors, investors and officials sought and obtained information regarding alternative forms of tourism and ecotourism, while the President & CEO of "Eco-action" Mr. Konstantinos Makras also conducted a speech on the topic of "Ecotourism development".

Related: <http://www.oikodruseis.gr>

UK: Fair Trade Mourns

Anita Roddick, a pioneer of eco products and fair trade, died at the young age of 64. From the humble & mischievous beginnings of 'The Body Shop' right next to an undertaker - who complained - to the sale of its 2,000+ stores to still-testing-on-animals L'Oreal, Dame Anita Perella Roddick, both outspoken and active in favour of environmental and social justice, and consequently against the Iraq war - never failed to spark controversy and annoy the powerful. To the rest of us, she proved that nothing is impossible if brains are combined with imagination and noble ideas. In recent years, she was also an enthusiastic patron of responsible tourism. A very eco journey to her! Read her very last blog posts at: <http://www.anitaroddick.com>

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